

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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CRITICAL HABITAT PROPOSED FOR THE CALIFORNIA SANTA CRUZ LONG-TOED SALAMANDER

Critical habitat for the Santa Cruz long-toed salamander in California has been proposed by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The proposal, published in the June 22, 1978, Federal Register, would make the area included subject to full protection under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 and would ensure the integrity of two of the four remaining ponds and surrounding areas where the species lives and breeds. The areas proposed as critical habitat, totaling approximately 222 acres, contain most of the entire known range of this salamander.

Under Section 7, no Federal agency can authorize, fund, or carry out any action that would adversely affect the critical habitat of listed species.

The Santa Cruz long-toed salamander is among the rarest and most critically endangered amphibians in the United States. It has been officially listed as endangered since 1967. Much of the hope for the survival and recovery of the species depends upon the maintenance of suitable, undisturbed habitat and breeding sites.

The Santa Cruz long-toed salamander was discovered in 1954 at Valencia Lagoon, Rio Del Mar, Santa Cruz County, California. It belongs to a family of North American salamanders which are rarely seen except during their brief migratory trips to breed in quiet freshwater ponds or lakes. Two years later, this subspecies was found at Ellicott Pond, approximately 4 miles southwest of Valencia. Additional populations were discovered recently in Monterey County. It is estimated that less than 10,000 animals survive in all these sites.

Until recently, the salamander have been under pressure from overcollecting by professional and amateur biologists as well as from the threat of land development. Due to its extremely limited range and very specialized breeding habits, this endangered amphibian is vulnerable to any changes affecting its habitat.

The Service has proposed to determine a portion of the Valencia Lagoon and Ellicott Slough area of Santa Cruz County as critical habitat for this species.

Interested persons wishing to comment on this proposal should write the Director (OES), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240, by August 21, 1978.